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GEOGRAPHIC AREA, ORR, CONTRIBUTION TO NIE 61-59

THE OUTLOOK FOR BURMA

CIA/RR G/I 59-47

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THE OUTLOOK FOR BURMA

I. PRESENT SITUATION

B. Foreign Policy

Burmese actions towards neighboring countries -- particularly China -- as related to frontier problems ~~are~~<sup>are</sup> closely associated with an interaction of physiographic and cultural factors along its landward borders, a belt of rough mountainous country populated predominantly by non-Burman groups and virtually isolated for several months of the year by heavy rains. These same factors that historically protected the centers of Burman power in the Irrawaddy Valley from foreign aggression are still important, but today they have become liabilities rather than assets.

Land transportation routes from Burmese centers to outlying regions are almost everywhere long and arduous; and large segments of the mountainous frontier are without motorable roads. The border areas are therefore extremely difficult to patrol. The infiltration of these areas from China or other adjacent countries by small groups for military or subversive purposes is relatively easy, thus giving the military initiative to the aggressor state. Burmese ground forces are at a serious disadvantage, first, in detecting either overt or covert military aggression and, second, in counteracting it quickly. These

disadvantages, resulting from difficult terrain and lack of transport, are illustrated by the ability of the KMT irregulars and other insurgents to continue their operations in the frontier areas over prolonged periods. Burmese military counterefforts are further complicated from June through October by heavy rains, which disrupt road traffic and seriously reduce the use of airfields. During the rainy season, hostile guerrilla forces would, in effect, be granted an annual reprieve in which to rest and regroup. At all seasons, protection of the Burmese frontiers is complicated because the mountainous border regions are inhabited predominantly by non-Burman minority groups with ethnic kin in Yunnan, Laos, Thailand, or India. The political sympathies and ideals of the border peoples do not in all cases coincide with those of the Government of Burma. Consequently, these groups must be dealt with cautiously and treated circumspectly.

## II. PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS

### B. External

The changing positions that the Chinese Communists have taken regarding the territory involved in the Burma-China border dispute suggest that Peking will continue to raise additional problems in order to delay the final settlement and demarcation of the boundary. Problems most likely to be raised involve two areas -- the section of the northern Burma-China boundary formed by the McMahon Line, and the state of Kokang -- and the watershed principle the Burmese are likely to adopt as the criterion for settlement of the dispute concerning the northern portion of the border.

The northern section of the Burma-China border from the Izu Raz Pass (27°37'N-98°25'E) on the east to the juncture of the Burma-India-China frontiers on the west is the eastern segment of the McMahon Line. In an exchange of correspondence between India and China over their common frontier, Peking has declared emphatically its nonacceptance of the McMahon Line. The status of the McMahon Line has not been specifically raised in the Burma-China dispute, but it seems logical that the Chinese would reject it in this case. In this same section, the Chinese may also raise the question of the ethnic origins and loyalties of the handful of Tibetans -- estimated at about 100 -- who inhabit the high mountains of Burma adjacent to the frontier.

Kokang, the second area of possible contention, is one of the Northern Shan States located east of the Salween and bordering China. The state is only about 800 square miles in area; and the majority of its population, totalling about 50,000, is reportedly Chinese. In the 1894 boundary convention between China and Great Britain, Kokang was acknowledged as Chinese territory -- although Burmese officials later objected on the grounds that the state was a feudatory of the Sawbwa of Hserwi, whose other dependencies were all located in Burma. The Convention of 1894 was modified in 1897; and, by the terms of this second Sino-British agreement, which forms the basis for the present delimitation of most of the Burma-China border, the state of Kokang was retroceded to Burmese jurisdiction. Currently the status of Kokang is somewhat unclear, as was recognized by an official British paper, Report of the Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry, 1947, which stated

that Kokang's "de jure" position is not quite clear." Another British Foreign Office paper on the Burma-China border written in 1950 further remarked that Kokang might be demanded by China "at any time" on the grounds of (1) its inclusion within China under the 1894 treaty, (2) its predominantly Chinese population, and (3) "equity" and "justice" because the 1897 border agreement, from the Chinese point of view, was an "unequal treaty."

Assuming that the Government of Burma will follow the traditional British policy of regarding the Irrawaddy-Salween watershed as the basis for delimiting the border north of 25°35'N, certain factors may tend to weaken the Burmese position. The Chinese could point out that in two areas on two different occasions, the Burmese (or British) have admitted Chinese claims west of the watershed. The more recent is the current tentative concession by the Government of Burma of the three Kachin villages of Hpinaw, Gawlam, and Kangfang and surrounding territory. Earlier the British had excluded from British-Burmese control the upper headwaters of the Taron River, a tributary of the Nmai Hka. The watershed was not claimed as the frontier in this particular area because British survey parties (of 1911-13) had ascertained that Chinese influence dominated in the upper Taron Valley. In view of these two exceptions to the watershed principle, the Chinese may press for additional territorial concessions west of the watershed -- particularly the Ngawchang Valley where the Chinese claims have been most persistent.

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